3 9999 08632 571 7

No. 551.263

THE TRUSTEES OF THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY
OMNIVM
LVX
CIVIVM
OF THE CITY OF
BOSTON
1852 1878

APR 27 1909
JUN 6

A

DISCOURSE

ON

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

REV. JOHN PIERPONT,

PREACHED IN

7551.263

THE FIRST CHURCH, DORCHESTER,

SUNDAY, SEPT. 2, 1866.

BY NATHANIEL HALL.

BOSTON:
WALKER, FULLER, AND COMPANY,
245, WASHINGTON STREET.
1866.

A

DISCOURSE

ON

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

REV. JOHN PIERPONT,

PREACHED IN

7551.263

THE FIRST CHURCH, DORCHESTER,

SUNDAY, SEPT. 2, 1866.

BY NATHANIEL HALL.

BOSTON:
WALKER, FULLER, AND COMPANY,
245, WASHINGTON STREET.
1866.

Ent. June 1, 1905

PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

To the Rev. NATHANIEL HALL.

The undersigned, members of the First Parish, on behalf of themselves and many in the congregation, respectfully request the publication of your sermon upon the Life and Character of the late Rev. JOHN PIERPONT, preached last Sunday morning; believing it a fit and appropriate memorial of one whose long career was so signally marked by his ardent and persistent devotion to the cause of human rights, the freedom of the oppressed, and the promotion of social and moral reform.

FRANKLIN KING.
J. C. LINDSLEY.
DANIEL DENNY.
HENRY J. NAZRO.
THOMAS GROOM.
WALTER CHANNING.

DORCHESTER, SEPT. 4, 1866.

DISCOURSE.

"I have fought a good fight." — 2 *Timothy*, iv. 7.

I WOULD speak, to-day, of one, whom many of you have known personally, all of you by repute, some of you as once your minister; whom I have myself known, these many years, in a more than professional friendship: — one who, a week ago this Sunday morning, was to be seen — his erect and vigorous form giving but slight evidence that its eighty-first summer was passing over it — sitting, a reverent worshipper, before the pulpit which was once his own, among the people who were once his charge; and on the third day following — the erect form prostrate, the throbbing heart pulseless, the noble brow wearing Death's hueless pallor — was borne before that same pulpit, among those same fellow-worshippers, on the way to his final rest, beside the dust of near and dear who had gone before him.

Friends, believe me, I would not allow myself to speak of him, in this hour consecrate to holiest themes — that funeral scene speaking to my heart, though it did, and does, with touching and tender appeal — were it in indulgence of feelings private

and personal merely, did I not believe that the life thus passed from us was worthy our consideration even here, and had for all of us teachings and incentives for good. We are here to be instructed in the highest truth, to gain deeper convictions of it, stronger persuasives from it; and far better is this accomplished than by discussing it as an abstraction, by viewing it in a life that it orders and inspires. And when a life that can thus, in good faith, be characterized — a life, whatever its defects and limitations, eminently true and loyal and heroic, has passed away, it is well, it is fitting, it is but gratitude to its Great Giver and Inspirer, that, standing within the radiance of its earthly setting, in the retrospect of its lengthened course, we should point, and say, — "Behold"; that, as it sinks, full-orbed and lustrous, in the glowing west, we should seek to prolong its hallowing twilight; should seek, in other words, that the work it did, the witness it bore, the beauty it exhibited, should be a surer and a wider heritage of memory and heart.

"I have fought a good fight," said Paul, as, nearing the close of his apostleship, he looked back upon its course; — words, they have seemed to me, which this servant of God, this laborer for Christ, just departed, might fitly have repeated, as expressing what was true of his own life-course; not indeed in apostolic measure — *that* assumption he would have been the quickest to repel — but yet in some worthy measure,

and in a kindred sense. At any rate, they are words which came to me in such application as I heard the tidings of his death, and I take them for the shaping of what I have now to say.

"I have fought a good fight." Fought. There are those who can go through this world peaceably. Its conflicts are not for them. Their *natures* are peaceable. They were not born to be combatants. They shrink instinctively from all antagonisms with their kind. They would rather submit to evils, putting faith in a righteous Providence for their removal, than personally and directly assail them. There are those who by position and circumstances are not *called* to any special warfare against evil and wrong. Their lot is cast on quiet paths. The gage of battle falls not at their feet. They hear no summoning trumpet-note upon the breeze. There are no Goliaths in sight of them, defying the armies of the living God, and making the alternative competent championship or ignominious flight; and if there be, they do not feel that it is for *them* to come out of their loved seclusion from the heat and jostle of life and mingle in the combat. Perhaps it is not. And yet, in this world of ours, as not here and there alone but everywhere it is — falsehood and wrong ever seeking, openly or secretly, to dominate over truth and right and stay the course of human progress and redemption; seeking ever a baleful dominance in the world *within* — how can one do his duty, to his

age, to himself; be faithful, be safe, without putting on the armor, without wielding the weapons of the Christian soldier; without earning for himself some claim to the morally heroic? It cannot be. The call to "fight the good fight of faith" is addressed to all, has a solemn significance for all; while that other call with which it stands united, "lay hold on eternal life," can be met only as the former is met. "Eternal Life" is gained, and gained alone, by struggle, conflict, fight. And still, there are natural differences in men, in respect to all this, and providential differences in positions. Though all must be, and are called to be, "soldiers of the cross," there are those who, in the tendencies of their being, and the demand of their position and their times, are called to be eminently such — and must be, or be recreant to a voice as clearly divine as ever prophet or apostle heard. And of them was he of whom I speak. The combative was largely an element of his being. There was slight reluctance with him, if any, to assume the attitude of the contestant. The clarion of battle found quick response within him; and if it were the summons to an all but "forlorn hope," all the quicker was the girding and the going. Not that he loved conflict for its own sake — not that he loved it at all; but he loved Truth, Right, Freedom, with heartiest love, and enjoyed the exercise in their defense of his varied gifts, against all opposers. He loved men. There was no hate in his bosom — none,

towards *them*; but toward the sophistries that misled them, and the evils that degraded, and the selfishness that would take or keep from them God-given boons, there *was* a hatred, intense and inextinguishable. It was *because* he loved men that he hated whatever cursed and wronged them; rallied against it all the keenness of his logic, and all the sharpness of his satire, and all the pungency of his wit, and all the might of his invective, and all the wealth and glow of his imagination. He was a servant of the Truth; and whatever it bade him that he did. He was a defender of the Right; and wherever it posted him there he stood. He was a Christian hero; and there was no foe he dared not face, no out-works he dared not storm, no Philistine-challenge he would not accept — singly, if it must be, and armed but with the stones of Truth, and faith in Him who nerves the arm and guides the aim of those that wield them in his name. He was a moral-reformer; and there was no great social wrong he did not assail, with stalwart blows, sheltered and sustained no matter by what power of custom and self-interest and prestige.

He was of the prophetic order. He stood, by native endowment and exercised function, among the seers; in that line, running through the ages, and which God, for his world's sake, keeps ever unbroken, — the line of those whose gaze is onward, who catch glimpses of a better day and announce its coming, who call men from traditions to principles,

from precepts to law, from shams to reality. A prophet's fire, a prophet's tongue, were his. And as he moved among men, in manliest dignity and grace, there needed no other signet than nature's own to declare his calling. The soul had fitting mantle in its robe of flesh.

A prophet; and if to some it seemed too much after the type of him who stood, stern and uncompromising, within the wilds of the Jordan, and too little after the type of him, loving and gentle, whom he heralded, it was because they knew not all the man.

True enough, the Baptist was, in some respects, his prototype. The later like the earlier prophet was "a voice crying in the wilderness," whose burden was "Repent" — aye, the "wilderness," for though he moved among a city's crowds, there was, at times, a solitude around him drearier than nature's, which his unsparing rebukes of wrong had made for him. His, too, was a judgment of men searching and spiritual; his the criterion of eternal law; his the radicalism that "lays the axe at the root of the tree;" his a mission in announcement and preparation for the better day, the surer, wider reign of Truth and Righteousness. But the Christ had come *before* him. He knew that "Lamb of God," whom John but pointed to. He had drank into that spirit of love and tenderness. The sweetness of that benevolence and the filialness of that piety he was no stranger to. I am sure of this. Let the breathings of his soul in

those sacred lyrics he has left, those hymns for the Communion-table, which touch the tenderest chord of the disciple's heart, attest; though they who knew him best bear in their memories even surer witness. In contrasting the Master with his Forerunner we shall err if we oppose a gentle meekness in the one to a rebukeful boldness in the other, as if the former was in exclusion of the latter; forgetting those denunciations, than which the world's literature has no sterner, levelled at the covetousness and hypocrisy of the Pharisee. They know but little of our nature and the movements of its deeper life who know not that these elements, differing, may yet harmoniously consist, and how the very intensity of the one makes possible the intensity of the other.

That there may have been with him of whom I speak, in the many provocations to which he was subjected and the temptations to which his nature gave peculiar strength, a mingling, at times, of unhallowed zeal; that there may have been errors of judgment, in pursuance of his ends; that he may have made "exciting topics" needlessly exciting, and the tone and manner of his denunciations needlessly offensive, is not improbable. But it must be a narrow and ungenerous soul that is not willing to overlook whatever of these there may have been, in the loftiness and pureness of his aims, in the entireness of his fidelity, in the grandeur of his self-regardless heroism.

That his speech did not always "distil like the dew;" that he "thundered his divine protests against the unrighteous deed;" that he so "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come" as to make the sturdier than a Felix tremble, is true. And it could not have been otherwise, and he have been true to himself. It could not have been otherwise, and he have been the power he was for humanity's good. Truth calls for more than one class of weapons in her service. God's warriors have different modes of defence and attack. Especial exigencies demand especial appliances. That the *heart* of our brother was right in all he did, that he was Christian in his temper while he was loyal to his convictions, let these lines of his, written while under the burden of censure and neglect, attest: —

"Father, thou knowest whether, when thou saidst
'Go, feed my sheep,' I fed them with things true,
And that, because I loved thy truth and them;
Or whether I kept back from them thy truth,
And doled out falsehood, spiced with flattery,
Because they loved and asked it; and because
Not for the flock I cared, but for the fleece."

* * * *

"To be at one with thee is all I ask;
'Tis all the heaven my spirit can enjoy;
'Tis all I've prayed for, or can ever pray;—
Let me, beneath the covert of thy wing,
Henceforth be shielded from the piercing shafts
Of men who know me not, and could not know.
Forgive them, Father, for they did not know
"The glorious Gospel of the blessed God."
Thou mad'st it mine to preach that Gospel to them.

Thou knowest whether faithfully I preached,
And whether faithfully they heard, or not.
Thou knowest all my weaknesses and theirs.
Judge, thou, between us; but, in judgment, Lord,
Remember mercy both to them and me!"

And here may well be quoted these other lines, from one of his shorter poems, as disclosing the vein of sweetest tenderness that was in him, and as shewing the sacred and life-enduring potency of a pious mother's influence;—

* * * * *

"She led me first to God;
Her words and prayers were my young spirit's dew.
For when she used to leave
The fireside, every eve,
I knew it was for prayer that she withdrew.

That dew, that blessed my youth,—
Her holy love, her truth,
Her spirit of devotion, and the tears
That she could not suppress,—
Hath never ceased to bless
My soul, nor will it, through eternal years.

How often has the thought
Of my mourned mother brought
Peace to my troubled spirit, and new power
The tempter to repel!
Mother, thou knowest well
That thou hast blessed me since thy mortal hour!"

"I have fought a good fight" he could have affirmed of himself before he entered the sphere of the preacher and the reformer. He must have knelt in a self-consecration no less holy than its own ere he girded himself for the pulpit's work. It is told of

him that when, in early manhood, having embarked with another in business, he failed, with large indebtedness, he surrendered at once his comfortable home for one among the humblest, and lived with his family on scantiest food, rather than touch what he felt belonged to his creditors, though the usages of mercantile life in such cases, as he was told and as he knew, allowed him; writing, in his retirement, to meet the needs of his poverty, that principal poem of his, "the Airs of Palestine"; while subsequently, regardless of the compromise which his creditors had made with him in cancelment of his indebtedness, he rested not till he had paid the last dollar of it. It was the work of years; but he did it. Truly, he had earned the right—a divine right it was—to preach honesty, self-devotion to principle; though no words of the preacher could have equalled in nobleness the deed of the merchant.

His manhood thus nobly begun was consistently lived through. Nothing could ever bend him from his uprightness. His erect form had moral likeness in the man within. A MAN—*that* he was—as few are found; a kingly man; with the robe—richer than those of palaces—of a spotless integrity; with the crown—more glorious than that of kingdoms—of holy rectitude.

And let me not forget his patriotism. Nay, that we *must* remember; for we need to-day, and may need yet more, its example and incentive. To go no

farther back for proofs — though his whole course affords them — than to the call, in '61, for volunteers. He answered it by offering his services as chaplain, and marched with his regiment, through the streets of Boston, to the scenes of war — none with a firmer tread than he, though seventy-six years had laid their weight upon him. Youth and vigor might stay at home, if they would, in an indifference to the issue; *he* would *go* — though the issue, whatever it might be, could be of far less moment to him personally, so soon, in the course of nature, to pass away. But the country was to live; humanity was to live; and the sway over them of Truth, Freedom, Justice, entire and perpetual, was worth dying for, he felt, a thousand times.

Friends, does there not come to us from the contemplation of this vanished life, incitement, aspiration, inspiration, in the work given *us* to do, the warfare to wage? Life is ever a warfare; — but never more than to-day and here was it such; never more than to-day and here was there needed the heroism of the Christian warrior, a consecration to Freedom, Justice, Country, against the banding hosts that, in the march of their passionate and sordid purposes, would trample them in the dust. Oh, let us be true! let us be brave! let us rise above party and prejudice and passion and self-interest, and stand and do battle, in this new summoning hour and through life, for God and Humanity; — following

thus our departed brother; aye, following a greater than he, in that greatest of apostles; and a greater than all in him who gave himself on Calvary, a willing martyr for man's redemption!

Let me detain you for a moment's reference to some of the circumstances preceding and attending our friend's departure. On leaving Washington for a visit to his former home in Medford, he expressed the wish that he might die there, among scenes and memories so dear to him, and be buried, side by side, with the earlier companion of his life. The wish, uttered, so far as is known, with no felt premonitions of his end as near, was fulfilled. Going to his sleep on Sunday evening, apparently in his usual health, he slept himself away, with motionless quiet, and the morning light saw him gone — none knew when, save the over-watching angels. There was no sickness, there was no suffering, there was no decline. His sun sank shadowless from mortal view. That rounded life was translated to awaiting spheres so that it knew not death. The long warfare was closed at last — was closed in peace. He had fought the good fight; he had finished his course; he had kept the faith. He had gone — may we not say it? — to receive from "a righteous Judge," "a crown of righteousness." And now, from those invisible heights his life pleads with us, as it did below, pleads with each of us,— "fight the good fight of faith."

Boston Public Library
Central Library, Copley Square

Division of
Reference and Research Services

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.

Please do not remove cards from this pocket.